M. Herskovits & Herskovits E-6 (1933-1935) 1934
[illegible]
Katamansa

and forth on the sandy bank to the rhythm of the voices in the drums, but their gods would not come. They could not dance, they could not find peace while the drums spoke, and so this disconsolate pacing went on week after week, on those days when the river gods might be danced to. Sometimes the pulse of the drumming, quickening for an interval, stirred the dancers. A shudder would go through the body of one or another and the dry throats would fall to uttering the sacred cries, but almost the next instant the hand of the drummer would go limp, and once more the listless, agonized pacing would continue. The gods were angered. When the drums called them from the river bottom, they came grudgingly and remained sullen, refusing to make their wishes known, and no gods or ancestors came to counsel the wise men in their sleep how to bend the will of the spirits of the river.

In the fields the parched earth baked in the merciless heat until it was like whitened bone. The few plants that had pushed their way up through the sandy soil were now brown dust which any wind might scatter. But there was no wind. No rain, no wind, for in the river the god of the wind dwells, and in the sky the rain god, and these gods are twins, and twins have but one soul, since it is with the gods as it is with humans.

No rain, no wind. Famine was upon the land.

At last, at the village of Opoku a woman had a dream. She was a pure albino, one of the type who, together with those who show by the slight turn of red in their wooly hair a strain of albinism, are called Toné people, and are identified with the river gods. To this Toné woman the gods came in sleep, and spoke their will.

"And what was it you gave to the gods?" we asked Sedefo, who had fallen silent at this point in his story.

"Mati," he said, after a pause, "I am not an important man. You ask what I may not tell. My mouth cannot take upon itself to speak what concerns our big men."

This much he would say. A boat filled with things had been sent down the river. Men standing at the river bank

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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had seen a hand reach out for the boat, had seen it vanish out of sight. The gods had accepted the offerings. That year the Granman from the city, the white Granman, had to send rice from a far country to feed them, but the next year the crops were good, and all had been well since that time.

"And was that when this shrine was removed to the other island?"

"*M'an sabi. A kan de*—I do not know. It is possible."

2

"When you get to the Mamadam," we had been told by a priestess in the city, "wash your face in the running water, and call on the Mother of the River three times."

Another had said, "If your foot should trip anywhere, be sure to call on your ancestors, but if you should happen to slip at the Mamadam, you must go at once to the river, strike the water three times, and ask the Mother of the River to release your soul. It is a bad thing to lose your soul there."

And our principal story-teller in the city, who was something of a wit, had said: "You both have light eyes. Your hair is not dark. You are not unlike the Bonkoru people who are light, and who, up the river, you will hear called the Toné folk." He was speaking of albinos. "It may be that you have a river god without knowing it. When you come to the Mamadam the spirit may come to you. You may find yourself speaking the tongue that only the Toné people know, and dancing the dances to the river gods, and swimming up the rapids. It will be a fine sight to see you dance to the drums. There was once such a woman. A woman white as you are, you hear? I myself saw her dance. When she danced, she wore red, and put a plug through her lip, and as she danced her color changed. She became black. When the spirit was satisfied, it let her go, and she paled and was a white woman again. I myself saw that woman dance. I saw her grow black while she danced, and saw

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wash every day until Wednesday came to permit her to dance. When she washed with the sacred moistened clay, she rubbed the white on her children. 75 776 783

"Will all the women dance on Wednesday who have the same god as you?"

The child's mother shook her head. "If the god comes to them, yes. If he doesn't come, they can't dance."

And the bassia's wife said, "The women who are in the menstrual house can't dance. When they hear the drums, they are troubled, but they must remain quiet." 841

The woman had spoken too eagerly and too loudly, for her husband, overhearing her, said something in a low rapid voice, and at once the women fell silent and several of them remembered errands they had to see to. 593

4

"When men are in the council house, you mustn't interrupt," said the bassia's wife to the white woman. "If we did what you did just now, our husbands would scold us when they got home, and if we did it again, they would beat us." 576 [593]

She had taken upon herself all the prerogatives of friendship, and continually criticized the manners of her visitor.

The old were to be greeted last. A gift was to be received by another. When returning a piece of carving to another's hand, the carving should rest on the outstretched palm, while the elbow of that arm lay on the palm of the other hand. In the presence of men, a woman who took a stool should turn it about and sit on its narrower side.

"Never sit on the bare earth. The spirits don't like it," she said one instant, and the next, "Don't play with your fingers on top of your sun helmet. Your breasts will get long. Drumming is not a thing for women." [806] [567]

There had been other warnings during earlier visits to Bush Negro villages, but none had borne down so heavily upon the shortcomings of the stranger.

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village. A household was not confined to one building only, but few who were not men of rank and means had more than three. One was for the woman and her children, another for storing the crops, and the third was the man's treasure house, where women might not come. It was like the matter of wives. Only men of position could afford more than one. But if a man had two wives and both lived in his village, then perhaps five huts would bear a design identified with him on the carved side posts which outlined the low doorway. This design would recur in the various carvings he had made for his women—it was his crest. And though a man from another village, who was not related to him, might like it, and liking it copy it, this practice would be socially frowned upon.

A village quarter, however, did not contain only dwelling places, and storehouses, and men's treasure houses. Certain families also had in their part of the village an enclosed shrine for the family gods. If in a given family a powerful Vodu, or snake god, had come to an ancestress and had in a dream, or in a seizure, or through a revelation made to an obia man, chosen her as his *'asi*—his priestess or medium—then with this disclosure came the instructions for the place of locating a house of worship to that Vodu, and the type of house it was to be. Such a shrine, once erected, would be kept in the quarter, and worshiped by the members of that family. Sometimes in front of a dwelling hut, a low enclosure, the size of a small kennel, would stand a little to the side of the door. This was a house to Toné, the river spirit. In one such house lived a woman who had a great Toné god. She had the gift of prophecy. When the men gathered for a council meeting in the village of the Granman, then she, too, would sometimes be bidden to come and sit with the men, though, being a woman, she could never speak at council meetings.

"Touch her skin," the other women said, pointing out this albino woman, "and you will have your desires fulfilled."

In each quarter, too, there was an open house where the women did their cooking, and perhaps a platform or two,

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Chapter XI

THE COUNCIL OF THE ELDERS

I

GRANMAN Yankuso's day began before the break of dawn. When the day was at its coolest men's hearts were cool, people said here on the river, and when hearts were cool they could be trusted with weighty matters. But long before men came to stand outside the Granman's house advising with him as he lay in his hammock, the women arrived to report in low monotones the happenings of the previous day, and to take orders for the one to follow.

Lying in our hammocks in the council house, separated from the speakers by the wall of palings and perhaps five feet of clearing, we could hear voices outside from a little after three in the morning, until with the coming day the soft footfalls died down and gave way to the sound of stamping mortars and the cries of children recalling their mothers from early tasks.

What was being said outside we could not hear, but as the days wore on we learned to recognize the voices of the speakers. We learned to know from the rapid, contradicting flow of words which followed upon one of the Granman's orders, that it was his principal wife who spoke, or from the halting, crooning phrases, the voice of his eldest daughter, who had mastered her father's gentlest intonations and now of a morning brought them forth as though she were speaking her lesson. We learned to know as well the range and intensity of the subdued grunts with which

/196 cont./

[673] [754] [627] --Vengeance; if someone believes himself to be the victim of witchcraft, he must under no circumstances engage in counterwitchcraft or invoke his ancestors against his enemy. He may ask only for the protection of the ɔbia. It is Odun who [784] will avenge him by sooner or later killing the evil-doer.

[683] --Violence in any form whatever. It is regarded as a particularly serious offense against the laws of Odun to strike with an armed hand and to make human blood flow (1).

[684]

1. That explains the strictness with which the society of the Refugee Blacks limits the right of punishment granted to the wronged husband, who must strike only with bare fists in front of witnesses, never in the bush nor on the river. Fear of seeing human blood flow explains the reticence of the Boni toward minor surgical operations.

[826] [952]

[641] [586] --Any attack on personal liberty by material or moral coercion; in particular, neither a man nor woman may be constrained to remain in a marriage which has ceased to please him; nobody may be forced to reside here or there.

[232] The forms of magic so popular among West Indians, aimed at capturing a person's love, are for this reason rejected by the Refugee Blacks and considered as a form of wisi.

[769] [754] --Any evocation of the spirits of the dead, even to ask them for protection, other than in the public ceremonies provided for by custom. Thus nobody must go to the cemetery to pray alone on his parents' grave. Whoever would do that would immediately be considered as wisima.